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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 001018

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION YOUTH LEADER FEDARUK BEATEN, NOW SAID
TO BE CONSCIOUS, COMMUNICATIVE

REF: MINSK 1011

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) On December 12, authorities violently dispersed a pro-sovereignty demonstration by opposition forces on the eve of Russian President Putin's December 13-14 visit to Belarus. During the crackdown, police severely beat opposition youth leader Dmitriy Fedaruk just days after he returned from meetings with President Bush and Secretary Rice in Washington. Fedaruk was hospitalized with a head trauma December 12 but was said to be conscious and communicative December 13. End summary.

Malady Front's Fedaruk Sustains Head Trauma after Demo

¶2. (U) On December 12, Poloffs witnessed Belarusian police violently disperse a peaceful opposition demonstration on Minsk's October Square. Poloffs were close when police beat and seriously injured 19-year-old opposition youth organization Malady Front Acting Chair Dmitriy Fedaruk, just days after Fedaruk's visit with President Bush and Secretary Rice in Washington as a member of a delegation of Belarusian opposition and civil society leaders. A group of approximately 20 police forced Fedaruk several hundred meters away from the square, surrounded him and repeatedly struck him. After several minutes, police abandoned Fedaruk who was lying unconscious on a sidewalk. An ambulance later rushed Fedaruk to a local hospital emergency room where the physician on call confirmed to DCM and Poloff that Fedaruk was conscious, though not speaking, in stable condition, and being treated for serious head injuries.

¶3. (U) Fedaruk and up to 50 demonstrators, including opposition United Civic Party Chairman Anatoliy Lebedko, Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Deputy Chairs Vintsuk Vyachorka and Ales Mikhalevich, and Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Gramada" Chair Nikolay Statkevich took part in the unsanctioned rally. Chanting "Long Live Belarus," the activists converged three times on the square with EU and Belarusian white-red-white flags to support Belarus' sovereignty on the eve of Russian President Putin's December 13-14 visit to Minsk. Each time, about 100 uniformed riot police marched shoulder to shoulder and violently pushed the demonstrators and several bystanders who voiced support for the demonstrators off the square.

¶4. (C) In the evening of December 12, following the demonstration, a group of twenty activists, including Malady Front founder and Belarusian Christian Democracy Chair Pavel

Severinets, came to the hospital to express their concern and support for Fedaruk where they met with DCM and Poloff. The demonstrators expressed their gratitude to the Embassy for its presence both at the hospital and the demonstration and were gratified that the Department was prepared to issue a statement about the assault on Fedaruk. Fedaruk's mother echoed the activists' sentiments as she shared with DCM how profoundly Fedaruk's trip to the U.S. and his visits with President Bush and Secretary Rice had affected her son.

15. (C) Early December 13, Poloff telephoned Fedaruk's close friend and fellow activist Katerina Galitskaya who said that Fedaruk remained hospitalized but was communicative and showed signs of improvement. Ambassador, accompanied by emboffs and perhaps the Slovak Charge (currently representing the EU Presidency) will attempt to visit with Fedaruk when hospital visiting hours begin, at 5:00 p.m. local time.

Comment

16. (C) It is impossible to know the rationale behind the GOB's decision to use force to disperse peaceful demonstrators, though the imminent arrival of the Russian President and the recent opposition visit to the United States are two possible factors to consider. Rumors circulated that Malady Front was planning to disrupt Putin's motorcade on December 13 -- something the police would particularly want to prevent. No matter what the reason, this use of force is in marked contrast to GOB practice policing demonstrations earlier this year, and adds to the overwhelming evidence that the Lukashenko regime is uninterested in human rights and democratic reforms.

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STEWART